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Nation

Doctors group spreads realism of nuclear war

By DANIEL Q. HANEY
Associated Press Writer

BOSTON (AP) — Appalled by talk about the tactics of nuclear war, doctors are banding together to spread a sobering dose of realism about the scorched horror such a conflict would bring.

Their message: A nuclear attack on a U.S. city would be the final epidemic, a medical catastrophe for which they have no cure.

Led by the elite of the American medical world, they argue that preventing nuclear war is an issue of public health, not just politics and diplomacy. So far, their attention has resulted in the rebirth of one ban-the-bomb doctors' group, the creation of another and a series of well-attended meetings across the country.

"This is the greatest health hazard that humanity has ever faced," Dr. James E. Muller, a Harvard heart specialist who is one of the leaders of the movement, said in a recent interview.

Suddenly, doctors are talking to their patients and each other about a subject that most people would rather forget. They are telling them that the gore, the burns and the suffering of a nuclear war would be far beyond the scope of doctors to practice their craft.

The doctors' campaign against the bomb formally began at a meeting at Harvard last February. Now, even those who spearheaded the drive say they are amazed at the reaction from usually conservative physicians.

Almost 3,000 doctors have joined an all-but-defunct anti-nuclear weapons group called Physicians for Social Responsibility. The trustees of the American Medical Association voted to ask President-elect Ronald Reagan for a meeting to discuss the issue. And Soviet and American physicians have joined forces in a new organization called International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

"I think it started with Iran and then Afghanistan and then the Carter administration's approach to the situation ...," said Dr. Helen M. Caldicott, a pediatrician who recently resigned from Harvard Medical School to work full time as president of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

"The medical profession is conservative," she said, "but they see the imminence of nuclear war if the arms race continues unabated, and it just seems to be the right time now to start talking about it again."

Activists in this effort are careful to say that they are not endorsing any particular treaty or plan, such as SALT II, and they emphasize that disarmament must be undertaken by all nuclear powers, not the United States alone.

One of the most active spokesmen for this new medical awareness is Dr. Howard H. Hiatt, dean of the Harvard School of Public Health.

"In letters that I've written to doctors, I've said that I'm not articulating a security policy," Hiatt said. "I don't have any expertise in that sphere. But to the extent that our security policy is based on misconceptions concerning what doctors and hospitals can do in the event of a nuclear war, then it is our responsibility to speak out."

Hiatt described just what doctors can expect in the opening speech last February at a meeting sponsored by Harvard and Tufts on the medical consequences of nuclear war.

In a carefully subdued monotone, Hiatt outlined what would happen if a 20-megaton bomb fell on Boston:

The shock waves, heat and radiation would spread a circle of death four miles into the suburbs. More than 90 percent of the 3 million residents would die or require immediate medical attention.

But only 650 doctors would be alive to treat them.

If all the doctors worked 16 hours a day, seven days a week, it would take 26 days to see all the victims for about five minutes each.

But all the hospitals would be flattened, too.

That meeting was the start of the doctors' movement against the bomb. Among physicians who have since gotten involved are Jonas E. Salk, developer of the polio vaccine; Lewis Thomas, chancellor of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Institute; and Robert W. Berliner, dean of the Yale Medical School.

Muller, who is secretary of the new international physicians' group, went to Geneva, Switzerland, on Dec. 6, with Dr. Bernard Lown, another Harvard heart specialist, and Dr. Eric Chivian, a staff psychiatrist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There, they met with three prominent Soviet physicians — Eugene Chazov, head of the National Cardiology Research Center; Leonid Ilyin, chairman of the National Committee on Radiation Protection; and Mihail I. Kuzin, director of the Institute of Surgery.

Afterward, they issued a statement agreeing that nuclear war would be an unprecedented human disaster, that civil defense could not save a significant number of lives, and that the nuclear arms race is diverting money from medical research.

Since the first meeting at Harvard, Physicians for Social Responsibility has sponsored similar programs for doctors in New York, New Haven, Conn., and San Francisco.

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Haig Won't Rule Out Nuclear Warfare

Testimony To Senate Committee

By John Fogarty
Chronicle Washington Bureau

Washington

Alexander M. Haig, President-elect Reagan's choice for secretary of state, declared yesterday that this nation cannot rule out nuclear warfare because "there are still things Americans are willing to fight for."

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the retired four-star general said that although the nation's responsibility for maintaining peace in the nuclear age is "awesome," the U.S. cannot survive with a peace-at-all-costs attitude.

"If we make just the maintenance of peace our goal, we will bring about the end of peace. There are worse things than war," Haig told the committee as it opened what could become protracted hearings on his nomination.

"There are things Americans must be willing to fight for. We must understand that. We must structure our foreign policy on that credible and justified premise," Haig said in answer to a question from Senator Howard Baker, R-Tenn.

"America was spawned by war," Haig said, quoting Revolutionary War leader Patrick Henry's famous phrase, "'Give me liberty or give me death.' In this century, we Americans have fought to defeat dictatorships."

Haig, only the second military man in the nation's history to be nominated for secretary of state, opened the nationally televised hearing with a lengthy statement in which he said America's foreign policy must be balanced, consistent and reliable.

He strongly suggested that all three elements have been missing in the foreign policy of President Carter and pledged to restore these elements if the Senate confirms his nomination.

Haig said he could think of no occasion since World War II in which the United States should have used nuclear weapons in achieving foreign policy goals.

Answering a question by Senator Clairborne Pell, D-R.I., Haig denied that he had ever suggested the use of nuclear weapons by U.S. forces in Vietnam.

However, he said the nation's arsenal of tactical nuclear weapons and missiles equipped with nuclear warheads are an important part of the nation's effort to deter foes from attacking and their use cannot and should not be ruled out.